



National Park Service



# **SUPERINTENDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT**

**Fiscal Year 2011**  
**(October 1, 2010-September 30, 2011)**



**Missouri National Recreational River**

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*Cover photos: The 2011 flooding had positive and negative impacts upon the river including inundated homes and creation of sandbar habitat critical for endangered species.*

# Missouri National Recreational River FY 2011

## **I. Superintendent's Office**

### **A. Historic Flood of 2011**

The historic flood of 2011, where Missouri River flows rose to a peak of 160,000 cfs for several months, impacted park resources and operations in significant ways. The park's response to the emergency situation was swift and decisive with a focus upon safety, public outreach, credible scientific monitoring, and long-term floodplain goals.

The river was closed to recreational use by the US Coast Guard in May and did not reopen until Labor Day weekend. While on-river visitation was down over the summer, once-in-a-lifetime spillway releases attracted record numbers of visitors to our partner's facilities, dramatically increasing our visitor contacts.

Public outreach was focused upon visitor safety and information sharing. The park's website acted as a clearinghouse for information from the multitude of agencies that operate on the river. Radio and newspaper contacts were focused upon visitor safety. While always sensitive to the plight of affected river-side landowners, the park told a holistic story about both the positive and negative impacts of floods on the riverine ecosystem and those who live and recreate on the river.



### **B. Congressional Contacts**

Over 50 formal and informal contacts were provided to various field representatives from the seven congressional delegations within the MNRR. The Superintendent visited Senators Thune and Johnson and Representative Noem at their offices in Washington, D.C. and followed-up on concerns and questions raised during those conversations regarding flood impacts within the park. The park worked closely with Senator Nelson's office and Ponca State Park to build a demonstration project on environmentally sensitive bank stabilization. The park organized boat tours in October for field staffers to witness flood impacts first hand and dialogue with a select group of local landowners, government officials, non-profit environmental interests and other stakeholders on park issues.

### **C. Basin-wide Missouri River Committees**

The MNRR represents the NPS on following basin-wide Missouri River Committees:

#### **Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC)**

MRRIC consists of 70 members who represent a wide array of local, state, tribal and federal interests throughout the entire basin. MNRR staff actively engaged the Science & Adaptive Management, Federal, Tribal, and Recovery Program MRRIC Work Groups.

### Missouri River Basin Interagency Roundtable (MRBIR)

MRBIR is a collaborative forum for federal agency executives. MNRR staff participated on the Planning and Sediment Management Sub-committees. MNRR leadership in sediment management led to recommendations for changes in dam operations which, if implemented, will enhance park resources.

### Missouri River Flood Task Force (MRFTF)

MRFTF is an interagency task force addressing post-flood recovery efforts along Missouri River. MNRR staff contributes to the Floodplain Management and Compliance/Regulatory Work Groups. Regional and other park staff are on the Communication, Tribal, and River Management Work Groups.

The MNRR also provides support and backup to regional staff and other parks on the Missouri River Ecosystem Restoration Plan, Missouri River Authorized Purposes Study, Missouri River Natural Resources Committee, Missouri River Annual Operating Plan, Siouxland contingency plan/emergency response and Hyperion groups.

## **D. Major Park Issues**

MNRR staff collaborated with multiple agencies stakeholders to address several major park issues:

### Missouri River Flooding

Coordinated public message with US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) during flood and initiated joint post-flood monitoring program with USACE and University of South Dakota to inventory flood impacts and develop remediation strategy;

### Highway 12 realignment

Working with Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail developed quantitative evaluation criteria of scenic impacts of each alternative in the EIS;

### Emergent Sandbar Habitat Program

Worked closely with USACE officials to mitigate impacts of construction activities to recreation and adjacent landowners. Park resource staff designed an independent shoreline monitoring program to address USACE complacency regarding landowner erosion concerns;

### Land Protection

Initiated “String of Pearls” land protection planning process (in conjunction with United States Fish and Wildlife Service) to develop joint conservation areas using Land and Water Conservation Funds;



### Bank Stabilization

The flood of 2011 brought an unprecedented amount of unpermitted bank stabilization to the MNRR. The park developed a balanced approach to post-flood remediation of bank stabilization that protects the scenic values of the river while not unduly burdening river-side landowners. Public meetings with impacted landowners were held in several locations to discuss the NPS policy regarding unpermitted activities that occurred during the flood emergency.



*Unpermitted, broken concrete bank stabilization near Clay County Park*

The park is using principles grounded in the Wild and Scenic River Act to address this long-term intractable issue in a systematic fashion. Park staff, working with the Denver Service Center, organized an Outstandingly Remarkable Values workshop in August to develop a report that will serve as a foundation for future planning documents which will be used, among other things, to develop documented and defensible bank stabilization policies.



*Unpermitted bank stabilization at Brooky Bottom, NE using non-compliant materials (broken concrete)*



## **II. Planning & Regulatory**

### **A. Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) Workshop**

With assistance from the Denver Service Center, Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR) completed an Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) workshop. Forty state, federal, and local enthusiastic experts in various fields participated in the workshop. The Final ORV Statement is expected to be completed in January 2011 and will serve as a foundational document for future planning efforts including an Land Protection Plan and a Comprehensive River Management Plan.

### **B. Long-Range Interpretive Plan**

The Long-Range Interpretive Plan was updated this year. Two formal meeting with over 40 stakeholders were held to solicit input and comments on the plan. The plan provides a frame work to guide the Interpretive Division over the next ten years.

### **C. Joint Land Protection Plan**

The MNRR has partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to initiate planning for additional wildlife refuges within the MNRR; Ponca Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge and the Niobrara Confluence National Wildlife Refuge. The project originated from Secretary Salazar's office and is informally named the "Missouri River String of Pearls". Currently, a Notice of Intent is being developed and will be published in the Federal Register early in 2012. Initial public scoping meetings are scheduled for the Spring of 2012.

### **D. Regulatory & Compliance**

Nine Wild and Scenic River Act, Section 7(a) reviews were completed in 2011. A template was developed for Section 7 (a) reviews that standardized the NPS responses and provided better justification for the NPS findings. Compliance was conducted on NPS projects including 7 National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 reviews, entering 11 projects in PEPC, and managing 21 research permits in RPRS.

## **III. Administration**

### **A. Budget**

Park ONPS budget was \$941,629.00, a decrease of \$47,122.00 from fiscal year 2010. The travel ceiling was \$23,000.00 of which \$22,336.00 was expended. Thirty-five travel authorizations and 31 travel vouchers were processed.

Administrative staff created and approved eight purchase requests with subsequent receivers to pay the invoices. There were 200 charge card expenditures transferred to corrected accounts. Before the program was discontinued, MNRR wrote 3 third party drafts. Staff processed 22 electronic fund transfer payments to various vendors who did not accept charge cards for payment.

### **B. Human Resources**

MNRR had four returning seasonals including one diversity candidate from the MWR Student Academy. An additional diversity student was hired seasonally along with 6 others. The park's first seasonal law enforcement ranger started in May 2011. The park hired two Teacher-Ranger-Teacher (TRT) participants; however, a new requirement for agreements with local school districts severely limited additional TRTs. A new Chief of Interpretation was selected and transferred to MNRR after the incumbent Chief left for Chamizal NHS in August 2011. Two Resource Management SCEP appointees were converted to career-conditional appointments. All Centennial Seasonal positions were filled.

## **IV. Maintenance, Facility Management, and Development**

### **A. Agreements & Clean-up Efforts**

In order to provide a consistently high quality visitor experience throughout the MNRR, two formal agreements to maintain boat ramp areas with the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission were developed during 2011. From these agreements, joint work plans will be developed each year outlining maintenance responsibilities of each party.



Park staff completed the entry of backlogged facilities into the FMSS database and the API was updated to reflect new information. The access road and parking lot at Mulberry Bend Overlook was chip-sealed and re-striped.

Clean-up efforts during FY11 included not only the partnership-led Annual Missouri River Clean-up but also a private lands clean-up led by the park on a private property. The USFWS and the South Dakota Department of Environmental Management contributed funding and the USGS contributed two staff members for the private lands clean-up. The two clean-up efforts removed over 10 tons of

tires, metal, and other trash from the river and riparian areas.

The MNRR underwent an Environmental Audit in August. There were only 5 non-substantive findings. All findings will be addressed during FY12. The park reduced its carbon footprint by replacing two pickups with hybrids and installing “Big Belly” solar compacting trash cans which reduced garbage pickup trips.



### **B. Safety**

The safety program was greatly expanded and formalized in 2011. An Integrated Pest Management Plan was completed and a full suite of Job Hazard Analyses were also written, approved, and presented to all staff. All hazards were labeled and documented within the office and shop. A travelling MSDS book and a Hazard Communication Spill Plan were developed. Safety inspections were completed regularly. Park staff received chainsaw instruction, with the added benefit that one half acre of invasive red cedar was removed from Myron Grove State Game Production Area as a service to our partner during the training.

### **C. Signage**

New road signs were installed to orient visitors to river access sites and augment park branding efforts. To address the need to indicate to boaters that they are entering and exiting the MNRR from various river points, nine MNRR signs were placed at boat ramps along the Missouri River and four MNRR signs were placed along the lower Niobrara River. A sign was developed and installed for the St. Helena boat ramp that replaced an outdated sign that did not adhere to NPS graphic identity standards.

## **V. Resource Stewardship**

### **A. Flood Assessments**

The 2011 flood impacted resources throughout the park. Several monitoring programs were put in place to inventory and describe the flood's impact and inform post-flood management decisions. Working with the University of South Dakota-Missouri River Institute through a Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit agreement, a detailed bankline condition survey was initiated immediately following the flood. The study's main purpose is to identify hazards, trash, areas of erosion, and un-permitted bank stabilization and record their location, geographic extent, and condition. The results are being shared with the Regulatory Branch of the Corps of Engineers and a cooperative plan for addressing the need for after-the-fact permits and other activities will be developed by both agencies.

Two internal studies were developed to document the flood impacts. The first study aims to document the biological response of three inundated floodplain habitat types at Bow Creek Recreational Area. Study parameters included zooplankton, amphibians, macro-invertebrates, and water quality data. Final data analysis is pending.

A land-based photo comparison program was also initiated this summer. Photos were taken during 5 flood stages and the results have been added to the park website for all 49 sites. The parks long-term river-based photo-point monitoring was also completed for all 150 sites along both reaches of the MNRR.



**July 19, 2011 – 156,000 cfs**

**October 12, 2011 – 38,000 cfs**

### **B. Monitoring Species of Concern**

Monitoring of threatened piping plovers and endangered least terns on the Niobrara River continued in 2011. The 2011 annual national census found that the Niobrara River supported more adults of both species than all the other Nebraska watersheds combined (including the Missouri River). Reproductive success for both species on the Niobrara River was also high in 2011. Flooding prevented the annual monitoring of eagle nests, however, numerous bald eagle juveniles and adults have been observed post-flood. Flooding also prevented the annual zebra mussel veliger sampling, conducted in cooperation with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks.





### C. Restoration Efforts, Cultural Resources & Public Outreach

Ecological restoration activities were completed on the MNRR's Mulberry Bend archeological site including broadcast spraying Round-up on a 6-acre archeological site and native prairie seeding of the site. In addition, exotic vegetation was controlled across 40 additional acres.

One new archival museum accession was documented during FY11 and MNRR purchased a secure fireproof cabinet for archives. Due to the flood and accelerated erosion in some areas, spot checks of known archeological sites near the river were conducted to ensure no damage had occurred. No site damage was detected.

In order to promote the understanding and protection of both the natural and cultural resources of the MNRR, the Resource Management Team developed two 6-page newsletters highlighting interesting and timely facts about cultural and natural resources and related management activities.



*NPS staff work cooperatively with USFWS electrofishing crew in backwater channel in park*



*Park staff capturing a piping plover on the run*

## **VI. Resource and Visitor Protection**

### **A. Law Enforcement Program Start-Up**

The summer of 2011 marked the beginning of a law enforcement program at MNRR with the hiring of its first seasonal protection ranger. Supervision was provided by PIPE's Chief Ranger. Although there had been some complaints of illegal activities such as Jet Skis and airboats, the extent of illegal activities was not known. In addition, a confusing mix of overlapping authorities on the river made it unclear which agencies were responsible for providing law enforcement. The park consists of over a 100 miles of non-contiguous rivers and creeks and runs through two states, nine counties, and an Indian reservation. All of these agencies have primary jurisdiction, as well as the federal government through the Army Corps of Engineers, the US Coast Guard, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The groundwork for a park law enforcement program was begun by building good relationships with these agencies, counties, and states, to determine how the park could assist and fit in with their activities. A law enforcement report was produced to collect and summarize information on the need for law enforcement and the work that other agencies carry out in enforcing laws on the river.

### **B. Patrols & Investigations**

Observational patrols and interviews were accomplished to investigate reports of illegal activities and to provide information to the park. People using airboats on the Niobrara River were contacted as well as a local resident conducting a business operation within the park boundary with an airboat. With the help of the Nebraska Airboater's Association the word has spread regarding the ban on the use of airboats in a national park and we expect to see a marked decrease in this activity in the future. During the fall of 2011, hunting activity at Bow Creek Recreational Area has been closely monitored. Regulations were made clear, posted at the entrance, and are being enforced.



### **C. Communications Plan, Compendium & New Acquisitions**

A communications plan has been written so that law enforcement rangers can have contact with a dispatch anywhere within the boundary of the park. The State of South Dakota has offered NPS access to their communications center that is operated by the State Patrol. The park's first compendium was written this summer and is currently under regional review. This will be made available to the public on the park's website when finalized. The compendium, which conforms to the Midwest Region's requirements, includes the hunting rules and regulations on park property. Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park provided the annual LE refresher and gave our park four shotguns to assist with the park's fledgling law enforcement program. A safe was purchased to hold them. A siren and light bar were purchased for the boat and will be installed this winter. The flooding on the Missouri this summer prevented boating activity all summer long. We expect to address the personal watercraft problem on the river next summer when boating activity resumes.



## **VII. Interpretation and Education**

### **A. Programming, Visitor Satisfaction & Junior Rangers**

During the summer of FY11 MNRR Interpretive staff conducted a total of 1,074 formal, informal and Junior Ranger programs for a total of 7,492 visitors. This was an increase in attendance of 116%, mainly due to the great interest in the Missouri River due to the 2011 flooding. The annual Visitor Survey led by the Interpretive Staff showed dramatic increases for MNRR visitors in the areas of visitor satisfaction from 93% to 97% and visitor understanding from 43.5% to 89.25%.

An inaugural partnership for Junior Ranger Day took place with MNRR and the US Fish and Wildlife Service working in concert to hold a kids fishing derby. MNRR rangers deputized 70 Junior Rangers as part of the event. Three new age based Jr. Ranger publications were developed for use with the following age groups: K -4<sup>th</sup> Grade, 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade and for the High School level Jr. Ranger programs had over 390 attendees throughout FY11.



### **B. New Exhibits**

A new MNRR exhibit area was installed at the Lewis and Clark Visitor Center at Gavins Point Dam which is staffed in partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers. The exhibit helps build brand recognition for MNRR at a highly visited area. The exhibit contains an NPS banner replete with the arrowhead logo, an MNRR introductory park overview wayside exhibit panel, and a detailed map of the park to assist visitors with way finding.

### **C. VIP Program**

The Volunteer-In-Parks (VIPs) program was very successful this year. There were over 200 VIPs logging 1661 volunteer hours. Among their many notable accomplishments:

- assisting in the clearance of two tons of trash and debris from the MNRR during the annual Missouri River cleanup
- hundreds of educational visitor contacts about the what, where and why of MNRR's natural and cultural resources
- working the Missouri River Watershed Festival where they led hundreds of schoolchildren through educational stations
- making informal visitor contacts and staffing the front desk at the Lewis and Clark Visitor center at Gavins Point Dam



## **VIII. Partnerships**

### **A. The Water Trail**

The park nearly completed efforts to develop the park's first water trail in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies and non-profit interests. Signs were installed where possible. Flooding prevented completing the project this year, however, it will be completed in 2012. The water trail website can be found at: <http://www.mnrrwatertrail.org/>



### **B. Record Numbers of Visitors Served at Partner Sites**

MNRR interpretive and VIP staff worked in partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers in spearheading a banner year for visitation at the Lewis and Clark Visitors Center at Gavins Point Dam. Park Interpretive staff worked the majority of summer hours from June through August when an astounding 200% increase in visitation took place.

For the first time ever, MNRR interpretive staff expanded their partnership presence at Ponca State Park, by having a permanent or seasonal ranger on site during Wednesdays and Saturdays from Memorial Day through Labor Day. MNRR rangers logged over 200 hours giving programs and staffing the visitor center. This state park receives over half a million visitors annually. Interpretive MNRR rangers were also a vital part of the Missouri River Expo, which had over 40,000 visitors for 2011 event.

### **C. Partnerships to Enhance Stewardship**

The Resource Management Division participates in the Northeast Nebraska Cooperative Weed Management Area group by providing GPS/GIS support and training, botanical expertise, and physical assistance to the counties, public, and other land managers to control purple loosestrife, salt cedar, eastern red cedar, and phragmites within the river corridor.

Park staff worked closely with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to protect roughly 5,000 acres within the MNRR boundary through perpetual wetlands easements programs.

In response to a long-term serious bank erosion problem within Ponca State Park, the Resource Management Team assisted the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Senator Nelson's office with the design and installation of a successful biological stabilization structure to prevent the loss of a campground.



*NPS crew member hands hay bail to state park employee during bio-stabilization demonstration project at Ponca State Park campground*

## **IX. Conclusion**

The Missouri National Recreational River faced historic trials in 2011. Park staff, working closely with partners, coordinated activities ranging from public outreach to scientific investigations to meet the flood related challenges. The park emerges from the flood with much work left underdone, but with a stronger presence in the community and a determination to ensure recovery efforts are focused on long-term goals that will enhance the values for which this Wild and Scenic River was set aside for the enjoyment of the American people over three decades ago.

